

**The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University**  
**Ohio State Engineer**

**Title:** The Ecole Nationale des Beaux -- Arts

**Creators:** Kaltenbrun, James A.

**Issue Date:** May-1924

**Publisher:** Ohio State University, College of Engineering

**Citation:** Ohio State Engineer, vol. 7, no. 4 (May, 1924), 17-18.

**URI:** <http://hdl.handle.net/1811/33640>

**Appears in Collections:** [Ohio State Engineer: Volume 7, no. 4 \(May, 1924\)](#)

# The Ecole Nationale des Beaux--Arts

BY JAMES A. KALTENBRUN, '25



Students in Architecture the very thought of being able to study at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux-Arts at Paris, is the fulfillment of their highest ambition. The Ecole has been recognized for over fifty years as the finest architectural school in the world. Ever since it was founded, it has always been the choice of the Europeans to go there for advanced study. A great many of the architects in the United States have received their Master's degree there and among them may be found the best architects of this country.

The French realized long ago, the ideal method of developing architectural talent in the men of tomorrow, and in Paris, the stage seems set for the development of young geni. It is very evident that it should be so; for in Paris, the subject of Architecture can be studied to a great advantage, for it is the center of superb architectural examples of the past. It is this style of architecture which arouses the imagination. In Paris alone, unlimited opportunities are afforded in all branches of artistic endeavor.

The Ecole was founded in 1648 for the teaching of architecture, painting, sculpture, engraving and gem-cutting. It is located on the site of the ancient Couvent des Petits Augustins, on the corner of Quai Malaquais and the Rue Bonaparte, in one of the most picturesque and oldest parts of Paris. Debret and Duban erected the present building in 1820-38 and 1860-62. When the student enters the gate to the courts, he is given the impression of an open-air museum, as the courts are filled with many beautiful fragments of French edifices from the Gallo-Roman times down to the 16th century. The premises are completed inside with enclosed museums which exhibit a large number of casts. Inside there are also lecture rooms, ateliers and an extensive and valuable library.

Over 800 students of different nationalities go to school there. The tuition and other fees are free, as the French Government pays for all the expenses. Although the school is co-educational theoretically, there are seldom more than four or five girls that study architecture. Foreigners are admitted by competitive examination and are on an equal basis with Frenchmen. All of the examinations are in French. The only person that does not have to take these examinations for admittance is the winner of the American-Paris Prize Competition. He is sent to Paris for two and half years and is allowed to enter directly into the advanced class of design. All students of Architecture between the ages of seventeen and thirty are eligible for admittance. Before being admitted everyone must take an examination in Mathematics, Descriptive Geometry and the Fine Arts. Examinations are held twice a year and out of 600 students who take them only about 30 are admitted into the school. The degree of "Architecte Diplome par le Gouvernement

Francais" is awarded upon completion of a certain unit schedule, which consists of the various scientific studies as well as the theoretical design, which is required for a comprehensive architectural education. Although the curriculum is more thorough, in general, it parallels those of the American schools of architecture. A student may go to school there until he is thirty years of age, at which age he is automatically dropped.

If he fails he is denied reinstatement except by beginning all over again. As the minimum is fairly low, it is very seldom that any one loses his standing in this way. An energetic and brilliant student may pass this course in three years, although the majority take more time than this to complete the whole course, as the architectural course is very difficult. As the average student goes to school there for at least four years or more, it is possible to build up a very strong organization of capable understudies to the professors. These undergraduates help very much in breaking in the new students by preparing them for the larger and more advanced work. As the student life here in America is so short, the American schools are handicapped for this very reason. A great many students hardly grasp the fundamentals before they graduate, for the architectural mind does not develop until after a long period of incubation. In many cases it takes years to develop.

The drawings are done in special drafting-rooms or ateliers maintained by the students and patronized by the professor who criticizes and directs the work as it progresses. There are over thirty of these ateliers in Paris alone. Each one varies in size from twenty to fifty students, which is very similar to the clubs in American schools. Each atelier has a very strong alumni organization. The ateliers take the name of their patron professor, who is a member of the school jury that judges the finished projets. There exists a sportmanlike rivalry between the different ateliers in their efforts to carry off first honors on each piece of work submitted. It is this spirit of rivalry which is possibly the root of the incentive that keeps the students up night after night perfecting some minute detail in their projet, which might cost them a fall below their fellow students, if it is not solved correctly. Their idea of value of good marks is on an entirely different basis from that which the students in America are used to. The very best of their efforts are put into their projets and it is upon this that their whole life revolves. The student's incentive to do the best for his atelier and himself is through keen competition and patriotic pride.

In America, we have no school which is managed on the same basis as the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and ranks as high as it does. The nearest thing to the Ecole, which we have is the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, with headquarters in New York City. The purpose of this institute

may be best quoted from their own Circular of Information, which is as follows:

"1. To furnish instruction in the arts of Design at a minimum cost to students.

2. To bring art students under the criticism of artists who are engaged in active service.

3. To carry the students beyond the academic study of the arts into the province of their application and practice.

4. To bring about co-operation among the various art schools of the country. For this purpose it is desired that students, whether studying at other art or architectural schools, or organized in clubs or working independently are urged to take part in the competitive work laid out for them, which is explained later on, and that the instructors of such classes take part in the juries of award.

5. To allow art students to study throughout the year uninterrupted by holidays."

The department of Architecture is conducted by a Joint Committee of the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design and of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects. The purpose of the course is to furnish a systematic training in Design for draftsmen in offices and for architectural students in general.

In 1894, a course of Architectural Design and the study of Archaeology was established by the Committee on Education of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects. This course consists of a series of competitions which is modelled on the system of instruction in design at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris. In 1916 the Committee was reorganized in connection with the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design, in order to broaden its scope.

During each school year, the Joint Committee on Architecture conducts twenty-eight competitions for the study of Architecture and six for the study of Archaeology. These are supplemented by prize competitions, which include the Warren Prize, the Municipal Art Society of New York Prize, Spiering Prize, the Emerson Prize, and the Paris Prize. The first four are for fifty dollars each. The Paris Prize is a payment of three thousand dollars to the winner, distributed over a period of two and one-half years. This prize is authorized by decree of the French Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts to follow the lectures and take part in the competitions of the first class.

The Beaux-Arts design problems are given in nearly all of the architectural schools of this country. When they are completed they are sent to New York for final judgment, by a jury selected by the Institute. The grades depend on the type of problems that are being judged. In projets the highest grade obtainable is a first Medal. The courses are divided into groups which progress as one continues with the course. To enter the course one must pay a small fee and have a general knowledge of the Five Orders of Architecture. The first class is Class B Analytiques or Order Problems and are open to new students for the study of the application of the Orders of Architecture and their details at a

large scale. The next course is the Class B Projets which require not only a knowledge of good architectural treatment of the elevations and sections of a building in character with its use, but also, a well composed plan in which the general arrangement is simple, the structural features carefully studied, and the circulation and the location of the stairways arranged in a practical manner. The last course is the Class A Projets, which are based on planning and the principles of decoration. The plan of these projets should meet intelligently the requirements of the program and if the problem is a decorative one, the composition of the decoration may take precedence over the plan and structural requirements. Intermediate problems are given out every month or so, known as Esquisse-Esquisse (Rendered Sketches) for students in advanced design. These sketches must be completed within nine hours. The problems generally are of small monuments and the decorative treatment of some objects. The Archaeology problems are open to students in Class A and B, and are given to familiarize the students with the recognized styles of Architecture in the different epochs of design.

Draftsmen in offices are allowed to study the Beaux-Arts problems in the offices in which they work or in ateliers.